

Rev-A-News

Our DOR is always open to you.

Compliance and Collection

First Arrival of the New Year

On January 1, the Department of Revenue's web-based Business Tax Express (BTE) will be available for customers to file and pay their state withholding tax. BTE will be a secure application -- all filing and payment information will remain confidential.

New customers will need to complete the on-line registration. Current WARP on the Web customer and banking information will be loaded into this application. Customers will receive a confirmation number for each transaction submitted. Business Tax Express will allow one transmitter to report multiple employers. Accounting firms will be able to log into their own accounts to file and make payments for various customers. As much as two years of account history can be viewed online. This will be helpful in compiling annual reconciliation reports.

Later in 2004, additional tax types will be added to this application. So, customers with multiple tax types will soon have the ability to log into one account to pay more than one type of tax.

We invite you to try Business Tax Express. To learn more and to register, please log on to app.discoveringmontana.com/bustax after January 1, 2004.

New System Success

The Department of Revenue's IRIS (Integrated Revenue Information System) has observed its first complete tax system success with its new contractor, Fast Enterprises, creator of GenTax[®]. The department selected GenTax[®] to address its technology needs, enhance customer service and replace POINTS.

Fast Enterprises specializes in providing tax solutions to revenue agencies. The company created the first commercial off-the-shelf (COTS) integrated tax-processing product and continues to support customers through ongoing technical investment and product improvement. The GenTax[®] software is also in production in Idaho, New Mexico and Louisiana, and the Provinces of British Columbia and Manitoba.

The company has devoted key resources and revenue experts to the Montana project. They currently have eleven dedicated staff on the project, including one of Fast's founding partners. All are working together with key DOR resources dedicated to the project as well as an extended group of users to get GenTax[®] operational in Montana.

The 2003 Montana Legislature passed a new rental vehicle tax and authorized the Department of Revenue to purchase a new computer system. The department has been working with Fast Enterprises since September 2003 and preparing IRIS to process tax information, input collections and reconcile with Montana's accounting system, SABHRS.

The first tax rollout on the new system was the rental vehicle tax, effective July 1, 2003. The IRIS project commenced in late August 2003, and the system was "online" by the end of September, one month later. The taxes were collected in October and the revenue processed and reconciled in November. Whenever a new tax is proposed, the Department of Revenue works closely with the Legislature to estimate anticipated revenue. The rental vehicle tax collected for the first

quarter was \$1,013,000. This was twice the amount expected, and represents 50% of the anticipated annual projection of \$2.1 million per year.

The department is pleased that our new computer system is beginning to administer important tax programs, which are critical to the day-to-day operations of our state. We are also confident the end result of this new system, known as IRIS, will provide better taxpayer service through improved staff efficiency, reporting and data accuracy and analysis.

The next two tax rollouts under the new system will be accommodations tax in March 2004 and cigarette tax following in April. Withholding tax is scheduled to go online in July 2004 followed by the Combined Oil and Gas System (COGS) in August.

Customer Service

MontGuides Available on Tax-related Topics

Publications from Montana State University's Extension Service are available on several tax-related topics. The Department of Revenue collaborated with the MSU Extension Service to produce the following three publications, called MontGuides. These MontGuides are available to download on Montana State University's website. Click on the links below to view the guides.

- Montana Medical Care Savings Account. Explains how a medical care savings account can reduce Montana individual income taxes. Contains information on who is eligible, what expenses are allowed, and how to set up an account.
<http://www.montana.edu/wwwpb/pubs/mt9817.html>
- First-time Home Buyer Savings Account. Explains how Montana residents can save money in a special savings account for the purchase of a first home and save on Montana income taxes. Includes an annual reporting worksheet.
<http://www.montana.edu/wwwpb/pubs/mt9918.html>
- Montana Estate Taxes. Includes information on when the Montana estate tax applies, how to compute and pay the tax, and how to apply for extensions and appeals. Click here to go there now. <http://www.montana.edu/wwwpb/pubs/mt9104.html>

MSU Extension also provides publications on topics that range from raising livestock, growing crops and protecting the environment to raising a family, starting a business and protecting your family's health.

Under Construction

A new informational section will be added to the department's website in December, to provide key information and increase awareness of the department's new Integrated Revenue Information System (IRIS).

The web pages are expected to be online by mid-month and will provide a variety of information, including a project overview and project status information. There will also be an information-request function to allow legislators, business taxpayers, state employees and citizens to ask questions or provide feedback about the project.

The department's website is located at www.discoveringmontana.com/revenue.

Department Plays Santa

The department's Abandoned Property staff continues to return money to rightful owners across the state. This fall, the department published 7,922 names in Montana newspapers with last known addresses of individuals for which property has been turned over to the state. Since September 30, more than 1,400 claims have been submitted. In October alone, 194 refunds were mailed out totaling \$193,820. Montana statute allows the department 90 days in which to approve claims once required documentation is received, and an additional 30 days in which to issue refunds.

About the Agency

Department Hires Internal Auditor

The Department of Revenue welcomes Susan Jensen, as our new internal auditor. This position is an integral part to achieving the most efficient and effective environment for meeting our department's mission. Susan will be a great asset to our agency. She has more than 14 years of professional audit experience in state government, working most recently with the Internal Audit Unit of the Department of Transportation and, before that, as a Performance Auditor with the Legislative Audit Division.

Change in Tax Policy and Research Structure

The structure of the department's Tax Policy and Research unit will be changing this month. The state's revenue estimation and monitoring functions are moving back to the Office of Budget and Program Planning (OBPP), effective December 15. Department employees Judy Paynter, Dan Dodds and Ryan Jose will be transferring to OBPP.

Tax policy research, fiscal note work, and committee support will remain at the department. Larry Finch will assume the duties of administrator of Tax Policy and Research.

Meet Our Leadership

Shauna Bingham, Resource Management Division Administrator

As the Resource Management Administrator, Shauna is responsible for the Liquor Distribution Bureau and the Human Resources Bureau which includes Human Resources, Payroll and Training & Education. Shauna has been with the department almost 10 years.

Shauna became the Resource Management Administrator for the Department of Revenue in June of this year. Shauna is a Certified Public Accountant and a 1993 Graduate of Montana State University with a B.S. in Business Administration. She is in the process of obtaining her Masters degree in Public Administration from the University of Montana. Before accepting her current role, Shauna was the Bureau Chief of Human Resources Bureau and Liquor Distribution Bureau. Prior to this, she worked as an auditor in the Corporation Tax Division where she started her career with the Department of Revenue and as a personnel officer for the Federal Department of Agriculture. Shauna was raised in Helena and has one son.

Calendar of Events

Committee Meetings

For committee membership, agendas, minutes and reports, visit our website at www.discoveringmontana.com/revenue.

Tax Reform Legislative Interim Committee and Property Tax Reappraisal Interim Committee meet at the State Capitol, Room 317 in Helena on January 12 beginning at 10 a.m., January 13 beginning at 9 a.m., and January 14, depending on need.

Holiday Closures (state holidays)

Christmas

Thursday, December 25, 2003

New Year's Day

Thursday, January 1, 2004